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MENDELSSOHN MAKES INITIAL CHURCHILL DOWNS APPEARANCE; MIDNIGHT BISOU BLOWS OUT THROUGH STRETCH FOR FRIDAY'S OAKS

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Thursday, May 3, 2018) – In possibly the most anticipated pre-Derby entrance at Churchill Downs since **Arazi** in 1992, runaway UAE Derby (GII) winner **Mendelssohn** emerged from quarantine Thursday morning to get his first feel of the track beneath the historic Twins Spires.

Trained by **Aidan O'Brien** and owned by **Derrick Smith, Mrs. John Magnier** and **Michael Tabor**, Mendelssohn and three stablemates entered the main track at the five-eighths gap and proceeded to walk and jog a clockwise 1¼ miles. They then reversed course and cantered one mile before exiting through the six-furlong gap and taking the scenic route back to Barn 17. Exercise rider **Dean Gallagher** was aboard Mendelssohn.

Before Mendelssohn came on the track, **Midnight Bisou**, the second choice at 5-2 on the morning line for Friday's Kentucky Oaks, blew out through the stretch with a :26.60 quarter-mile clocking.

KENTUCKY DERBY UPDATE

AUDIBLE/MAGNUM MOON/NOBLE INDY/VINO ROSSO – There were no missed beats at the **Todd Pletcher** barn Thursday morning. There rarely are for one of the nation's best horsemen, even as things heat up two days in front of his four-pronged attack on the world's foremost horse race – Kentucky Derby 144.

Pletcher sent his quartet of stakes-winning colts to the track at 7:30 to take advantage of the 15-minute "Kentucky Derby/Kentucky Oaks horses only" session that Churchill Downs puts in place in the week ahead of their two racing jewels. They all went about their business in professional fashion, going for good gallops of between a mile and a quarter to a mile and three-eighths.

The foursome had their regular exercise riders attached – **Amelia Green** on Florida Derby (GI) winner **Audible**; **Nick Bush** on Arkansas Derby (GI) kingpin **Magnum Moon**; **Carlos Cano** on Louisiana Derby (GII) hero **Noble Indy**, and **Adele Bellinger** on Wood Memorial (GII) star **Vino Rosso**.

Green, who has worked for Pletcher only since last September, was asked what she likes best about her charge Audible.

"He's so easy to work with; so relaxed," the native of Nottingham, England, offered. "He's the kind of horse that will do just what you want him to do. He's a pleasure."

Green had come to the racetrack at 17 via the British Racing School, followed by four years working with the English training legend **Henry Cecil**. She subsequently transitioned to U.S. racing by working for four years with the Southern California-based trainer **George Papadromou**, finishing up as his assistant, before signing on with the Pletcher crew last year.

Meanwhile, Pletcher said he was happy with Thursday morning's latest chapter of his Derby 144 book.

"They all got around there fine and came home safe and sound," he said. He noted further that they'd all go to the track for exercise Friday during the adjusted Oaks/Derby training period between 5:45 and 6 a.m.

He also said he would not paddock school his horses Thursday afternoon, though he'd had all four of them do so the day before. Following that afternoon paddock session, the trainer had walked over to the Kentucky Derby Museum and worked with their staff on an exhibit they've assembled of the many trophies and treasures of his former boss, Hall of Fame trainer **D. Wayne Lukas**.

Pletcher said he also took time to catch the updated Kentucky Derby film the Museum plays every hour.

"I liked the ending a lot," he said.

The ending now features the run through the stretch of the 2017 Kentucky Derby won by Pletcher's charge **Always Dreaming**.

BLENDED CITIZEN – The Kentucky Derby's lone also-eligible continued to train-like-he-is-going-to-run Thursday morning, going out with the Derby/Oaks horses at 7:30 with exercise rider **Jonny Garcia** in the tack. The pair went in a gallop for about a mile and three-eighths.

If Blended Citizen is to compete in Derby 144, there has to be a withdrawal of one of the current 20 horses entered for the race. And it has to happen before 9 a.m. Friday.

Should the **Greg Hall** and **SAYJAY Racing** colt get to do his thing Saturday, he'll be handled by his regular rider of late, **Kyle Frey**.

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BOLT D'ORO – Ruis Racing LLC's Bolt d'Oro galloped 1 ½ miles and jogged 1 ½ miles under exercise rider Jose Velazquez at Churchill Downs Thursday morning.

"He galloped a mile and a half and then he jogged to the starting gate and turned around. He didn't stand in it. Then he jogged one and a half," trainer/owner **Mick Ruis** said.

Wednesday night, Ruis was an invited guest at the Invicta Wrestling Club for youth in New Albany, Indiana. Ruis was a gold medalist while wrestling in the Junior Pan Am Games as a freshman in high school.

"It was great just to see those kids in there. They're sweating; they're hurting; they're bumping their heads together; they're building their character," Ruis said. "When they go out in the real world...they'll make it out in the world."

Ruis has pledged a \$10,000 donation to the club with the promise of a \$50,000 donation should Bolt d'Oro win the Derby.

"So I got a bunch of guys rooting for Bolt to win," he said.

Bolt d'Oro finished second behind **Justify**, the 3-1 morning-line favorite for the Derby, in the Santa Anita Derby last time out, but Ruis expects his trainee to be at his peak for a rematch in the Derby.

"He wasn't going to catch Justify with the fractions he had there. **Mike (Smith, Justify's jockey)** saw him coming on the outside, so he put him on the outside. **Javy (Castellano)** had to take him to the inside," Ruis said. "He wouldn't beat Justify that day, but I'll tell you what, he came out of that race really good. He cooled out in the testing barn after the race. He's never trained better any time we've had him in the barn."

BRAVAZO – Calumet Farm's Risen Star (GII) winner Bravazo went to the track during the special 7:30 a.m. training time and galloped an easy 1 ½ miles with regular rider **Danielle Rosier** aboard.

"It was just a routine gallop," Hall of Fame trainer **D. Wayne Lukas** said. "Not much more we can do now."

Bravazo, who is attempting to give Lukas his fifth Kentucky Derby victory and first since 1999, is scheduled to school during Thursday's first race.

Lukas, who is tied for second with **Bob Baffert** and **Herbert Thompson** with four Derby wins each, won his first Derby 30 years ago with **Winning Colors**. He also won in 1995 with **Thunder Gulch**, 1996 with **Grindstone** and 1999 with **Charismatic**. **Luis Contreras** has the Derby mount.

COMBATANT – Winchell Thoroughbreds and Willis Horton's Combatant has proven to be a fighter on the track, but his name is being used to bring awareness to an organization dedicated to helping disabled military veterans once their time on the battlefield is over. Combatant will wear a camouflage blanket for the walk over for the Kentucky Derby to promote Home For Our Troops.

Home For Our Troops is a privately funded 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization that builds and donates specially adapted custom homes nationwide for severely injured post – 9/11 veterans, to enable them to rebuild their lives. Most of these veterans have sustained injuries including multiple-limb amputations, partial or full paralysis, and/or severe traumatic brain injury.

On Thursday morning, Combatant's connections were wearing specially made T-shirts and the colt had a special visitor on hand to observe his 1 ½-mile gallop under **Angel Garcia** at 7:30. **Chris Gordon**, whose only other trip to Kentucky was for basic training at Fort Knox, made the trip from Florida to cheer on Combatant in the Derby. He is a recent recipient of a house from Home For Our Troops and will be joined Oaks and Derby Day by three other veterans and their spouses.

"This is big time," Gordon said. "This is great exposure for our organization."

ENTICED – Godolphin LLC's Enticed schooled in the Churchill Downs paddock before galloping 1 ½ miles under exercise rider **Jason Gracia** Thursday morning.

"He's doing great. All systems go," trainer **Kiaran McLaughlin** said. "It's a tough race. I hope things go our way. Everybody has to break well. There seems like there's a lot of pace. We'll see what happens."

Enticed, who closely stalked the early pace while finishing second in the Wood Memorial (GII) last time, is expected by his trainer to be placed in mid-pack when the 20-horse field enters the backstretch.

"The best-case scenario would be if three or four of them go real fast early and we can drop back to 12th or so and make a run, and obviously get there," McLaughlin said.

FIRENZE FIRE – Mr. Amore Stable's Firenze Fire open-galloped a mile Thursday morning at Churchill Downs.

"He did a mile in 2:07. I was really happy with it. He never took a breath. He hardly drank any water," trainer **Jason Servis** said.

Servis admits that the 1 ¼-mile distance of the Derby is somewhat of a concern.

"Do I wish the race was a mile? Yes. But it's a mile and a quarter, so it is what it is," Servis said.

FLAMEAWAY – During the 7:30-7:45 training period for Kentucky Derby and Oaks horses, John Oxley's Flameaway jogged a mile with regular rider **Chris Garraway**, ponied by trainer **Mark Casse's** assistant **Nick Tomlinson**, and galloped a mile on his own.

Casse said that he and his team did not realize Flameaway was a special horse until three months ago.

"That took a while, honestly," he said. "Early on, we thought he was just a nice horse. He's a horse that really developed."

Flameaway won the Sam F. Davis (GIII) at Tampa Bay Downs in February, and has since run second in the Lambholm South Tampa Bay Derby (GII) and the Toyota Blue Grass (GII) April 7.

"He's a horse that in the beginning was just average, and as he's gotten older he's gotten better and better."

FREE DROP BILLY/PROMISES FULFILLED – **Albaugh Family Stables' Free Drop Billy** and **Bob Baron's Promises Fulfilled** continued their regular 1 1/2-mile gallops Thursday at 7:30 a.m. for trainer **Dale Romans**.

"We're ready," Romans said. "This is a great week for everyone in the community. We have a lot of friends that celebrate the Derby with us and it will be a great day for my family and closest friends."

GOOD MAGIC – The 2017 Eclipse Award-winning Champion 2-Year-Old Male **Good Magic**, owned by **e Five Racing Thoroughbreds & Stonestreet Stables LLC**, had another day of galloping about 1 3/8 miles Thursday morning under exercise rider **Walter Malasquez**.

"He went super again and couldn't be doing any better," said trainer **Chad Brown**.

Brown, who won his first Triple Crown race last year with **Cloud Computing** in the Preakness Stakes (GI), believes he has the Curlin colt right where he needs to be. What exactly will he be looking for the next 48 hours?

"Just that he's maintaining where he's at and continues to move efficiently," Brown said. "That he's very sound, very happy, eating well, just the basics. We're trying to guide him into Saturday right on point."

Not surprisingly, Brown will be represented by several of his barn's most talented runners in this weekend's major stakes, including, on Friday, **Backyard Heaven** in the Alysheba Stakes presented by Sentient Jet (GII), undefeated Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies Turf (G1) heroine **Rushing Fall** and **Alteaa (FR)** in the Edgewood Stakes presented by Forcht Bank (GIII), and, on Saturday, **Lewis Bay** in the Humana Distaff (GI), **Dream Away** in the Longines Churchill Distaff Turf Mile (GII), emerging 3-year-old **Mask** in the Pat Day Mile presented by LG and E and KU (GIII), and Arlington Million (GI) winner **Beach Patrol** and **Kurilov (CHI)** in the Old Forester Turf Classic (GI).

HOFBURG – **Juddmonte Farms Inc.**'s homebred Florida Derby (G1) runner-up **Hofburg** had an uneventful gallop of about 1 1/2 miles under exercise rider **Penny Gardiner** this morning. It was a more typical gallop for the professional-acting Tapit colt, who the day before had gotten a bit aggressive in the stretch when fellow Derby entrant **Flameaway** moved up beside him.

"It was an unwanted bit of company," Gardiner said. "When my horse feels a horse at his hip he wants to go. But today he was so relaxed and in a rhythm. He was perfect. I am so happy with how he's doing and can't see how he could be doing any better."

Hofburg has three career starts and only two this year. The lack of experience will be a concern for many horseplayers, but Gardiner insists Hofburg is wise beyond his starts.

"You'd never know he's only started three times," she said. "He's the most professional horse and nothing fazes him – inside, outside – nothing bothers him. He's got such a good mind. He proved that in the Florida Derby because he got a ton of dirt on him that day and didn't mind, ran into it, got in the clear, and went right on."

"I just don't think experience will be an issue with him. He's so smart and so game and I think **Irad [Ortiz Jr.]** will be able to put him anywhere. He's willing and just waits for you to tell him what to do."

INSTILLED REGARD – **OXO Equine LLC's Jerry Hollendorfer**-trained Kentucky Derby (GI) contender **Instilled Regard** left Barn 41 at 7:30 a.m. with exercise rider **Edgar Rodriguez** aboard. Accompanied by a pony, he was followed closely by Hall of Fame trainer Hollendorfer and traveling assistant **Christina Jelm**.

The Lecomte Stakes (GIII) winner jogged to the paddock, where he schooled a couple turns around its oval walking ring. Leaving the paddock through the tunnel, he then jogged to the gate, where he stood before backing out, galloping 1 5/8 miles and returning to Barn 41 through the six-furlong gap.

The son of Arch and grandson of recently announced National Museum of Racing Hall of Fame electee **Heavenly Prize** exits a two fourth-place finishes in the Risen Star Stakes (GII) and Santa Anita Derby (GI), respectively.

"He's handling the track well and he's settled in well. Nothing seems to be bothering him at this point in time," Hollendorfer said. "We have no excuse walking over. He's been doing quite well. His last couple races weren't quite up to par, but there were different factors in those two races."

"Oddly enough, and I'm not making excuses, but the first time he ran (at Fair Grounds in New Orleans, winning the Lecomte on Jan. 13) it was 37 degrees (Fahrenheit) and when he came back (for the Risen Star over the same track Feb. 17) it was 80 degrees. I don't know if that was a factor or not. It's quite warm here, but has cooled down a little, so I think if it cools down here a little bit more, that might help my horse a little bit."

"The pace was slow in the Santa Anita Derby (on April 7) and we were far back, and I'm not criticizing the rider or the way the race came up, but that just was a fact," Hollendorfer continued. "They went three-quarters (of a mile) in almost 1:13, so it was hard to close ground and the horses that were up in front of the race (**Justify** and **Bolt d'Oro**) finished better than the ones trying to close."

Instilled Regard drew post 15 and was given morning-line odds of 50-1. In last year's Kentucky Derby, Hollendorfer faced a similar assignments when pupil **Battle of Midway** broke from barrier 11 at odds of 40-1 before a third-place finish behind **Always Dreaming** and **Lookin At Lee**.

"The race last year was more devoid of speed than this one," Hollendorfer said. "There's quite a lot of speed signed on in this race, so it'll be interesting to see what develops up front. As far as my horse in concerned, it might help him tactically. We're happy to be drawn outside, so our rider can look and see what's going on inside of him. Drayden is riding well, so we're happy to have him."

Drayden Van Dyke, 23, rides the Kentucky-bred for the first time since the Los Alamitos Cash Call Futurity (GI) on Dec. 9, where the pair crossed the wire third by three-quarters of a length after a physical stretch battle. They were then elevated from to second. **Solomini**, who also races in the Kentucky Derby, was demoted to third, while **McKinzie** was elevated to victory.

"I was glad to be the first horse to draw a post, so the pressure was off early," Van Dyke said. "Of course, I have never ridden the Derby, but the (15-hole) is a nice place to be because I have a little space to the left side. I have **Magnum Moon** (post 16) on my outside and **Mendelssohn** (post 14) on my inside and they both have speed, so I have horses to follow and hopefully find a good spot. The pace is going to be key. If they're rolling, I'll be coming with a big kick. If they're going slower, I'll want to be closer, so they don't kick away from me."

"I think the distance is key for him," Van Dyke concluded. "He wants to go that far and hopefully he gets a good trip and they let him run his race. He looks great and has an awesome mind on him. He's like an older horse and that's what you want in a race like this. Nothing bothers him."

JUSTIFY/SOLOMINI – Undefeated Kentucky Derby favorite **Justify** – owned by **China Horse Club International Ltd., Head of Plains Partners, Starlight Racing & WinStar Farm LLC** – galloped 1 1/2 miles at 7:30 a.m. during the Derby training session under regular exercise rider **Humberto Gomez**.

Hall of Fame jockey Mike Smith, who has been aboard **Justify** for his last two wins and has the Derby mount, assessed the gallop from the five-eighths gap with Hall of Fame trainer **Bob Baffert**.

"He looks amazing," Smith said. "I don't look as good as him but I feel good. He's just athletic, getting over the ground and didn't seem to struggle with it, looks happy, switching leads good. That's all you can look for and you don't know until they run but he sure looks the part."

Fellow Southern California-based jockey **Drayden Van Dyke**, who rode **Justify** in his debut win and continues to get on him for timed workouts, also was on hand, bouncing around the barn area with Smith. The Louisville native breezed **Justify** seven furlongs at Santa Anita on Saturday, a move he described as "effortless."

"Just like in the gallops here, he goes amazing," Van Dyke said. "He's just a horse that keeps finding more and more. I've never gotten to the bottom of him in the mornings so it's looking good for him."

Later in the Derby training session, **Solomini** – owned by **Zayat Stables LLC, Mrs. John Magnier, Michael B. Tabor & Derrick Smith** – galloped 1 1/2 miles, also with Gomez aboard.

"He looked more relaxed today, for sure," said Zayat Stables racing manager **Justin Zayat**. "It's the same-old Solomini. He's holding his weight, holding his energy. All systems go."

LONE SAILOR – **G M B Racing's Lone Sailor** galloped 1 1/2 miles at 5:30 a.m. Thursday with exercise rider **Maurice Sanchez** aboard for trainer **Tom Amoss**.

The Louisiana Derby (GII) runner-up's owner, **Gayle Benson**, also owns the New Orleans Saints and Pelicans.

"To tell you how much this means to Mrs. Benson, she called the commissioner of the NBA after the Louisiana Derby to make sure the Pelicans would not have a playoff game on Derby Day," Amoss said. "And, after sweeping the first round, they plan on Friday and Sunday."

MENDELSSOHN – **Michael B. Tabor, Mrs. John Magnier and Derrick Smith's** Kentucky Derby (GI) contender **Mendelssohn** had his first feel of the Churchill Downs racing surface on Thursday morning. Leaving Barn 17 at 7:45 a.m., the **Aidan O'Brien** trainee was the third of a single-filed Coolmore quartet, led by American Turf (GII) entrant **Threeandfourpence** and Pat Day Mile (GIII) entrant **Seahenge** and trailed by Old Forester Turf Classic (GI) entrant **Deauville**.

The four O'Brien pupils entered the main track at the five-eighths gap and proceeded to walk and jog a clockwise 1 1/4 miles. They then reversed course and cantered one mile before exiting through the six-furlong gap and taking the scenic route back to Barn 17. Exercise rider **Dean Gallagher** was aboard Mendelssohn.

"He did a very gentle exercise around the track," said **Pat Keating**, O'Brien's head traveling lad. "They're all doing well and all shipped in good. We just wanted to get him out there and stretch his legs. We're very happy with him and there were no problems. We couldn't be happier with how he's doing, so we just need some good luck on Saturday."

Although not at his home base of County Tipperary, Ireland's Ballydoyle, the son of Scat Daddy appeared comfortable, which likely stems from usual travel-mates Threeandfourpence and Seahenge. The trio of 3-year-olds will be running on the same card for the third consecutive time. All three raced in the UAE Derby at Dubai's Meydan and Patton Stakes (Listed) at Ireland's Dundalk in their previous two efforts.

"He's a very good horse," Keating concluded. "He's a good traveler and handles it perfect; very straight forward. He handles it a lot better than I do."

O'Brien is expected to be present on track Friday morning.

MY BOY JACK – It was one of the quiet mornings that occur weekly at trainer **Keith Desormeaux's** Barn 25 on Thursday and Kentucky Derby entrant **My Boy Jack** did what all his stablemates did, namely walk the shedrow. He was led on a shank by assistant trainer **Julie Clark**.

Desormeaux declares every Thursday and Sunday as "no training" days at his barn, giving both man and beast a chance to do some relaxing. The horses get walked, their stalls get cleaned and they get fed, but that's the extent of it. The routine surely seems to work, both for all involved as well as at the counting house. The native Louisianan's barn has chalked up north (and mostly well north) of \$1 million in purses for the past five years and, with only four months in the books so far in 2018, they've surpassed the million mark again.

Clark said "Jack" would school in the paddock during the races Thursday afternoon, just as he had Wednesday. My Boy Jack already has 10 starts under his belt, the most by any of this year's Derby runners. His record reads 10- 3-3-2 with earnings of \$645,145 heading into the mile and a quarter classic. The bargain \$20,000 yearling purchase has a trio of partners – **Don't Tell My Wife Stables**, **Monomoy Stables** and **West Point Thoroughbreds**. He'll also have his regular rider Saturday -- Hall of Famer **Kent Desormeaux**, Keith's brother.

KENTUCKY DERBY FIELD

The field for the Kentucky Derby, with riders and morning-line odds from the rail out, is: **Firenze Fire** (Paco Lopez, 50-1), **Free Drop Billy** (Robby Albarado, 30-1), **Promises Fulfilled** (Corey Lanerie, 30-1), **Flameaway** (Jose Lezcano, 30-1), **Audible** (Javier Castellano, 8-1), **Good Magic** (Jose Ortiz, 12-1), **Justify** (Mike Smith, 3-1), **Lone Sailor** (James Graham, 50-1), **Hofburg** (Irad Ortiz Jr., 20-1), **My Boy Jack** (Desormeaux, 30-1), **Bolt d'Oro** (Victor Espinoza, 8-1), **Enticed** (Junior Alvarado, 30-1), **Bravazo** (Luis Contreras, 50-1), **Mendelssohn** (Ryan Moore, 5-1), **Instilled Regard** (Drayden Van Dyke, 50-1), **Magnum Moon** (Luis Saez, 6-1), **Solomini** (Flavien Prat, 30-1), **Vino Rosso** (John Velazquez, 12-1), **Noble Indy** (Florent Geroux, 30-1) and **Combatant** (Ricardo Santana Jr., 50-1). **Also-eligible: Blended Citizen** (Kyle Frey, 50-1). All starters will carry 126 pounds.

KENTUCKY OAKS NOTES

CHOCOLATE MARTINI – **Double Doors Racing's** Fair Grounds Oaks (GII) winner **Chocolate Martini** galloped 1 ½ miles Thursday morning for trainer **Tom Amoss** and visited the equine spa.

The spa, which is located adjacent to Amoss' barn at Churchill Downs, is a 15-minute salt water treatment that helps horse's blood flow.

CLASSY ACT/PATRONA MARGARITA – Carl Moore's **Classy Act**, ridden by **Peter Mudd**, and Craig Upham's **Patrona Margarita**, with **Simon Camacho** up, galloped 1 ½ miles at 5:30 Thursday morning for trainer **Bret Calhoun**.

"They're loving the track," Calhoun said. "They look good and we're ready for Friday."

COACH ROCKS – **Roddy Valente**, **RAP Racing** and **West Point Thoroughbreds' Coach Rocks** galloped 1 ½ miles Thursday morning at 7:30 for Churchill Downs' all-time leading trainer **Dale Romans**.

Coach Rocks drew post No. 2 for the Longines Kentucky Oaks (GI) and is 12-1 on the morning line with **Luis Saez** aboard.

ESKIMO KISSES – **Magdalena Racing**, **Gainesway Stable** and **Harold Lerner's Eskimo Kisses** galloped 1 ½ miles Thursday under exercise rider **Mario Conbento** for trainer **Kenny McPeck**.

Eskimo Kisses will break from post No. 13 in the Longines Kentucky Oaks with Churchill Downs' perennial leading rider **Corey Lanerie** in the saddle.

HEAVENHASMNIKKI – Loooch Racing Stables’ Heavenhasmynikki completed her preparations for Friday’s Kentucky Oaks by jogging twice around the track with **Jake Radosevich** up Thursday morning.

A two-time winner, Heavenhasmynikki schooled in the paddock during Wednesday’s second race, a race that was won by her stablemate **Haywired**.

“She did good in there yesterday and she will walk in the morning,” trainer **Anthony Quatarolo** said of the filly who will be ridden by **Calvin Borel** in the Oaks.

Heavenhasmynikki never has raced on an “off track” but with a chance of rain in the forecast for Thursday afternoon as well as Friday morning and afternoon, a less than fast track is a possibility.

“She seemed to like it when she galloped on it,” Quatarolo said. “It is always nice to have a fast track, but you can’t fight Mother Nature.”

The 1 1/8-mile Oaks will mark Heavenhasmynikki’s debut racing two turns, and Quatarolo is hoping a speed duel develops on the front end Friday to help his filly.

“We have speed to the inside of us and to the outside,” Quatarolo said. “I’d like to see Calvin save ground and get her to relax and hope he times (her move) right. I think she will like two turns so she can relax instead of being in a sprint where the pressure is there to go.”

MIDNIGHT BISOU – The Santa Anita Oaks (GI) winner **Midnight Bisou** went trackside from Barn 38 at approximately 7:40 Thursday morning during the special Oaks/Derby training session. She was handled for trainer **Bill Spawr** by exercise rider **Jesus Comacho**, who doubles at home as the top outrider on the Southern California circuit.

Comacho took the daughter of champion Midnight Lute for a stroll around the Churchill Downs paddock, then went back to the main track for a mile and three-quarters gallop that finished up with an “open gallop” through the lane.

“She went well today,” Camacho said. “She was more relaxed. The last part of the gallop we went ‘open’ and she felt like she was doing :13s to me for the last three eighths.”

Churchill clockers timed the filly’s move through the stretch and gave her a :26.60 clocking for a quarter-mile.

Midnight Bisou is owned by **Allen Racing** and **Bloom Racing Stable** and comes into the \$1 million Kentucky Oaks with a record of three wins and two very close seconds in five lifetime starts. She’ll be ridden in the nine-furlong Grade I by **Mike Smith**.

Spawr said the filly’s schooling session in the Churchill paddock Wednesday afternoon was enough of that and that she’d stay in the barn today. She’s scheduled to go to the track during the 5:45-6 a.m. Oaks/Derby training period Oaks Day.

MONOMOY GIRL/SASSY SIENNA/KELLY’S HUMOR – It was the calm before storm Thursday morning in the **Brad Cox** barn as he makes final preparations for one of the busiest and high-profile days of his career Friday. He will not only start three fillies in the Kentucky Oaks, including morning-line favorite **Monomoy Girl**, but has eight other runners on the 13-race card.

Monomoy Girl, **Sassy Sienna** and **Kelly’s Humor** all went out to train at 7:30 a.m. and galloped 1 ½ miles.

“This was their last day to train,” Cox said. “They’ll all just walk tomorrow. Everything’s good. I was happy with how they all gate schooled yesterday. We’re ready.”

MY MISS LILLY – Courtlandt Farms’ My Miss Lilly jogged two laps around the track at 6:30 this morning, the first ponied by **Monnie Goetz** and the second setting off on her own around the 9/16ths pole. **Emerson Chavez** was aboard.

Trainer **Mark Hennig** described his ideal scenario – with a bit of humor – for the running of the Kentucky Oaks: “I’d like to see a nice live pace,” he said. “Not stupid, but a nice live pace, get some speed up there on the front end. **Monomoy Girl** get hung about eight wide in the first turn, **Midnight Bisou** get trapped behind horses at the quarter pole, and us have a clean trip. Not that those are the only ones to beat, but that would be a good start.”

Hennig said My Miss Lilly will walk tomorrow morning.

RAYYA – Sheikh Rashid Bin Humaid Al Nuaimi’s UAE Derby (GII) runner-up Rayya was out during the Oaks and Derby training session to gallop about 1 1/4 miles under exercise rider **Dana Barnes**.

“She just floats over the track, she’s such a nice mover,” Barnes said. “We’re very happy with her.”

Barnes has been impressed by the filly physically, but also mentally, due to the way she’s handled such extensive shipping, from Dubai to California to Kentucky, and the resulting changes of scenery.

“She’s got so much class and just acts like she’s been here her whole life,” said Barnes, referring to Churchill Downs. “All these people and nothing bothers her.”

The Baffert team has been highly complimentary of the condition Rayya was already in when they received her from **Doug Watson**, a former assistant to **Kiaran McLaughlin** who is regularly among the leading trainers in Dubai.

“A lot of the horses that come from over there will be a little stiff but from day one she was perfect,” Barnes said.

Baffert said that what they're attempting to pull off is "nearly impossible" but that he, too, was more hopeful after seeing how she arrived at Santa Anita.

"She came over in really great shape and she looks healthy and she's happy," he said. "Last time she got beat by **Mendelssohn** who just freaked that night. Nobody was going to beat him that night. But she beat the rest of the other boys there, so she's definitely a tough filly. And I expect her to run a big race."

Baffert gave the mount to Louisville native **Drayden Van Dyke** after they worked the filly at Santa Anita for the first time on April 21, in company with **Abel Tasman**, when they shared the fastest work of the day, six furlongs in 1:12.80 from the gate.

"The track is pretty deep at Santa Anita so that's pretty good," Van Dyke said. "She moves really good and is really classy so I'm happy to be on her."

Assessing today's gallop on his first morning at Churchill Downs this week, Van Dyke said: "Dana really got her to relax nice and she looked great."

TAKE CHARGE PAULA – Peter Deutsch's **Take Charge Paula** galloped 1 3/8 miles under exercise rider **Jason Gracia** before visiting the starting gate Thursday morning.

The daughter of Take Charge Indy set the pace last time out in the 1 1/16-mile Gulfstream Park Oaks before finishing second, 1 1/2 lengths behind **Coach Rocks** and 10 lengths ahead of the third-place finisher.

"We put blinkers on (for the Kentucky Oaks), which might make her more forwardly placed, but she already is forwardly placed. It depends on what No. 14 (**Monomoy Girl**) does – if she goes, breaks slow or doesn't go – but we'll be forwardly placed," trainer **Kiaran McLaughlin** said. "**Jose Ortiz** knows her. He rode her last time. We think the distance is not an issue. It's more of a question mark than the colt {**Enticed** in Saturday's Kentucky Derby} to me, but I don't think it'll be an issue. She ran very well last time around two turns."

WONDER GADOT – **Wonder Gadot** galloped 1 1/4 miles with regular rider **Orlando Cross** during the 7:30-7:45 training period for Kentucky Derby and Oaks horses.

Owner **Gary Barber** was on site to watch her train. Trainer **Mark Casse**'s ideal scenario for the running of the Oaks is simple: "A lot of speed, we sit mid-pack and come running."

John Velazquez, who won the 2004 Oaks on **Ashado**, has the mount Friday.

KENTUCKY OAKS FIELD

The field for the Longines Kentucky Oaks with jockey and morning-line odds from the rail out, is: **Sassy Sienna** (Gary Stevens, 15-1), **Coach Rocks** (Luis Saez, 12-1), **Classy Act** (Brian Hernandez Jr., 15-1), **Chocolate Martini** (Javier Castellano, 12-1), **Wonder Gadot** (John Velazquez, 20-1), **Kelly's Humor** (Irada Ortiz Jr., 30-1), **Rayya** (Drayden Van Dyke, 15-1), **Heavenhasmynikki** (Calvin Borel, 30-1), **Take Charge Paula** (Jose Ortiz, 15-1), **Midnight Bisou** (Mike Smith 5-2), **My Miss Lilly** (Joe Bravo, 10-1), **Patrona Margarita** (Ricardo Santana Jr., 30-1), **Eskimo Kisses** (Corey Lanerie, 15-1) and **Monomoy Girl** (Florent Geroux, 2-1). All starters will carry 121 pounds.

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WORKOUT VIDEOS

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Wednesday, May 2, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2KykZ9s>

Tuesday, May 1, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2FxnX45>

Monday, April 30, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2w2tOW2>

Sunday, April 29, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2HYJaPZ>

Saturday, April 28, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2Kk11AI>

Friday, April 27, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2I6rgc0>

Thursday, April 26, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2qX1a3J>

Wednesday, April 25, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2JwgZVZ>

Tuesday, April 24, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2HtmuZ1>

Monday, April 23, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2qXtuSG>

Sunday, April 22, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2FjgeWS>

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TWINSPIRES.COM TURF TALK WITH GARY YOUNG

Join expert clocker **Gary Young** along with TwinSpires.com handicapper **Ed DeRosa** as they breakdown each morning's Derby and Oaks training at Churchill Downs.

Tuesday, May 1, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2Jl6ui4>

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